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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [ETTC](#) [ETRD](#) [EAID](#) [IZ](#) [JO](#)

SUBJECT: NEW ROYAL COURT MINISTER ON KUWAIT, SAUDI ARABIA,
PALACE REORGANIZATION

REF: A. KUWAIT 5183

[B](#). AMMAN 7297

Classified By: Amb. Edward W. Gnehm for reasons 1.5 (b) (d)

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) New Royal Court Minister Samir Rifai told the Ambassador that, on his recent trip to the Gulf, the King had thanked the Kuwaitis for providing Jordan with free oil and had expressed the hope that it continue for a while longer, but neither sought nor received a commitment. PM Fayeze will return to Kuwait to discuss details in the near future. The Kuwaitis had expressed worry about Saudi Arabia, and Rifai said he sensed some acceptance in the region for the recent Riyadh bombing, because of popular frustration with the lack of progress in the peace process and the association of the Saudi regime with the U.S. and U.S. support for Israel. Rifai also described his planned reorganization of the Palace to add more substance and independence to Palace offices. However, the economic unit will be cut back because the King finally trusts the economic team in the new cabinet. END SUMMARY.

RELATIONS WITH KUWAIT, SAUDI ARABIA

[1](#)2. (C) The new Minister of the Royal Hashemite Court, Samir Rifai, told the Ambassador and PolCouns November 12 that King Abdullah's November 11 visit to Kuwait had gone well (ref a). The King had expressed thanks for Kuwait's provision of oil, and had mentioned delicately that it would be very helpful for Jordan if the oil continued for a while longer. The King and the Kuwaitis did not discuss any specifics, and Prime Minister Faisal al-Fayez will travel to Kuwait soon to follow up and try to get a firm Kuwaiti commitment. On atmospherics, Rifai said he got the impression that the Kuwaitis "really do like" King Abdullah, despite the rift with King Hussein after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. He said that the Kuwaitis had expressed great concern with the situation in Saudi Arabia and the latest Riyadh bombing.

[1](#)3. (C) The King, Rifai continued, had spoken to Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah after the Riyadh bombing, but had learned little about the situation: "the Saudis don't like to share much," he quipped. Rifai said that, sadly, there seemed to be some acceptance of the bombings in the street across the region, since the attack was aimed at the Saudi regime, which is close to the U.S., which supports Israel, which continues to occupy Palestinian land. "There will have to be movement on the Palestine issue," he argued, "for people to see these kinds of attacks as completely unwarranted."

PALACE REORGANIZING TO ADD MORE SUBSTANCE

[1](#)4. (S) Rifai also described the broad outlines of a planned reorganization of the Palace structure. The planned changes, he said, would rationalize support for the royal family and communication with "the people." Rifai hoped the reorganization would give the King "an independent source of information and advice," and increase the amount of substance in the work of Palace offices. (NOTE: An outgoing senior Palace official told PolCouns recently that the King and Palace staff were not entirely comfortable with the rosy reports they received from the General Intelligence Directorate (GID) on internal issues. For this reason, he said, the Palace had contracted independently for several opinion polls on sensitive topics, especially the efficiency and fairness of provision of government services. END NOTE.)

[1](#)5. (C) Rifai noted that -- bucking this general trend -- the Palace economic unit would become smaller because "the King now has his economic team in place" in the cabinet and a large Palace unit is not necessary. Rifai said that the King is comfortable with the new government "because he doesn't have to convince anyone of his program." The personal dynamics in the cabinet and in the initial Aqaba retreat meeting have been good, with ministers actually discussing their programs, not spouting platitudes. Rifai said that PM

Fayez was undertaking a "complete restructuring" of the Prime Ministry to streamline cabinet meetings ("we'll keep the sublime and get rid of the ridiculous") and delegate significant decision-making authority to the cabinet itself. PM Fayez, he argued, is the man for this job. He is easy going, has no agenda other than the King's, "and is not interested in grabbing power."

16. (U) Separately, the Palace announced November 16 that, as part of the Palace reorganization, the King had abolished the position of Chief of the Royal Court (distinct from Rifai's position as Minister of the Royal Hashemite Court) and appointing the incumbent, Yousef Dalabih as an advisor to the King. The King also appointed Yousef Hassan Eissawi as acting Secretary General of the Palace (chief management officer), the job Rifai held before his appointment as Minister of the Court.

COMMENT

17. (C) Like his father, former PM and current Senate President Zaid Rifai, Samir Rifai holds his cards close to the chest and gives away little. Rifai, educated at Deerfield Academy, Harvard, and Cambridge, speaks excellent colloquial English with a touch of sarcasm. He has moved into a position of great responsibility close to the King, and seems to have his confidence.

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